

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Houthi Attacks on Saudi Arabia Challenge the Mecca Defence Alliance

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S*ummary*

The Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia is the first significant test of the credibility of the Makkah Defence Alliance.

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis of Yemen have once again escalated, further exacerbating the security situation in the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi-led coalition, alongside the internationally recognised Yemeni government, has intensified military operations against Houthi targets across several parts of Yemen. The Houthis have carried out attacks against military and civilian targets, as well as critical energy infrastructure, in Saudi Arabia. The conflict has also extended into the maritime domain, posing risks to commercial shipping and vessel movement through the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait. This widening conflict has added another layer of complexity to the already volatile regional security environment. The evolving situation also raises questions about the credibility of the Mecca Defence Alliance, signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Pakistan.

Saudi Critical Infrastructure Attacked

As tensions in the Strait of Hormuz continue to persist, developments in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb have emerged as another major security challenge for Saudi Arabia. The Houthis in Yemen, who had largely remained dormant during the US–Israel war, have intensified their attacks against the Kingdom. Since the first week of September, they have launched several attacks targeting Saudi territory, including critical energy and civilian infrastructure, such as the Abha International Airport, King Khalid Air Base and the East–West Pipeline (Petroline). The pipeline, which has gained particular strategic significance since the onset of the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, is a critical alternative route for exporting Saudi oil to the outside world. Extending about 1,200 kilometres from the oil-producing Abqaiq oil field in eastern Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the Petroline has become a vital economic and energy lifeline for the Kingdom amid ongoing disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

The pipeline has been temporarily shut down following the attacks.¹ Saudi Arabia has stated that these drones were launched from Iraq, but it has resisted retaliation at the request of the Iraqi Prime Minister.² Several armed militia groups are operating in Iraq, over which the Iraqi government exercises little or no effective control. The attack on the pipeline demonstrates an apparent intention to target Saudi Arabia’s

¹ [“Saudi Arabia Shuts East-West Oil Pipeline After Multiple Attacks”](#), *Saudi Gazette*, 11 September 2026.

² [“Saudi Arabia Condemns Drone Attack from Iraq after East-West Pipeline Shut as Precaution”](#), *Arab News*, 12 September 2026.

economic capabilities and critical energy infrastructure at a particularly vulnerable moment. For the Kingdom, it represents yet another serious breach of its security environment. It highlights the difficulty of protecting an extensive critical infrastructure network from threats originating across multiple geographical fronts.

Disruption in the Red Sea and Bab el Mandeb

Meanwhile, the security challenge has also extended into the maritime domain. The Houthis have claimed to have established control over the Red Sea coastline of Yemen. This enables them to disrupt the maritime traffic and energy supplies passing through this strategically important waterway. They have also claimed to have captured Mayun Island in the Strait of Bab el Mandeb off the Yemeni coast.³ In addition, their seizure of the strategically important port of Mokha along the Red Sea has further strengthened their position along maritime corridors. Thus, the growing instability in the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb is creating an additional and increasingly complex security challenge for Saudi Arabia and the wider regional order.

Challenge for the Mecca Alliance

There have been severe condemnations from the regional countries of the Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom sought US assistance in responding to the deteriorating security situation. However, President Donald Trump reportedly declined the Saudi request.⁴ Against this backdrop, the crisis has also raised important questions about the relevance and credibility of the Mecca Defence Alliance between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, which stipulates that an attack against one member should be regarded as an attack against all.

Although both Türkiye⁵ and Pakistan⁶ have condemned the Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia, neither has, thus far, come to provide military assistance to the

³ [“Yemen's Houthis Capture a Red Sea Island in a Threat to Shipping, and Other Mideast Developments”](#), *The Associated Press*, 12 September 2026.

⁴ [“Trump Declines Saudi Crown Prince's Call for US Strikes on Houthis: Reports”](#), *The Hindu*, 11 September 2026.

⁵ Seyit Kurt, [“Türkiye Condemns Houthi Attacks Targeting Saudi Arabia”](#), *Anadolu Agency*, 8 September 2026.

⁶ Uroosa Jadoon, [“Pakistan Condemns Houthi Attacks Against Saudi Arabia, Backs Riyadh's Right to Self-Defense”](#), *Arab News*, 11 September 2026.

Kingdom against the Houthi attacks. A major visible discrepancy exists between the Alliance's stated commitment to collective defence and its members' response during a crisis. This raises questions about the Alliance's nature and credibility. It also raises the question of whether the Mecca alliance can go beyond a political declaration and become a regional alliance for collective security architecture in West Asia.

Pakistan faces a strategic dilemma. While it has committed to Saudi Arabia, it does not intend to be drawn into direct military conflict against the Houthis. Joining the war against the Houthis would not only entangle Pakistan in the regional war in West Asia. Still, it would also undermine the image it seeks to project as a mediator in the region. Pakistan is, moreover, keen to maintain good relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran simultaneously.

Ankara faces a similar predicament. Like Pakistan, it too has no desire to fight Saudi Arabia's war on the Houthis. Turkiye has established a close defence relationship with Saudi Arabia, but its participation in the Mecca Alliance is strategic and not driven by the threat facing Saudi Arabia. Importantly, Turkiye views the ongoing Saudi Arabia-Houthi clashes as part of the broader US-Israeli campaign against Iran. Given the close nexus between Iran and the Houthis, Turkish involvement in this conflict would likely be perceived as Turkiye taking sides against Iran, which could jeopardise its bilateral relationship with Tehran. Ankara, therefore, feels it prudent to maintain distance from the Saudi Arabia-Houthi clashes.

Conclusion

The Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia is the first significant test of the credibility of the Makkah Defence Alliance. As the Kingdom continues to confront the Houthi onslaught, the declared political and diplomatic solidarity of Turkiye and Pakistan has not translated into tangible military support. The Saudi-Houthi confrontation, therefore, exposes a gap between the alliance's declared commitment to collective defence and the willingness of its members to undertake joint action when one of them comes under attack. This episode underscores the primacy of individual national interests in shaping the strategic choices of the alliance's members in the volatile political landscape of West Asia.

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